

Chapter 1

Halloween

A small child tottered out of her now ruined house. She sat on the sidewalk and started crying. Some other children stopped to look at her, but no one wanted to help the weeping three year-old.

“Mummy!” she yelled. “Daddy! Baby!”

Why did their house break? Where were they? Why wasn’t Mummy comforting her, and Daddy making pretty lights for Baby? What was his name again?

She remembered Daddy yelling to Mummy. Someone was visiting the house, she had thought. Mummy had picked up Baby, and told Holly to get in the closet, and to not make a single sound, no matter what.

Mummy had started screaming. She couldn’t hear Daddy, and Baby wasn’t making noises. Then Mummy stopped. Green light flashed in through the crack under the door.

Baby started crying. Holly reached for the door handle, but quickly pulled back. Mummy said don’t come out, she thought.

More green light crept under the door, and then there was a loud bang, followed by some crunches. The floor caved under Holly, and she found herself in the kitchen. There were bits of plaster in the pumpkin pie. Holly heard something moving upstairs and reached up for the handle to the back door.

She couldn’t reach. She stretched on her toes and nearly fell over. “Please,” she whispered, begging it. “Please. Open.”

The knob turned. She rushed out and into the street.

Holly turned around and looked at her house. It was nowhere near as pretty as it had been. She wondered what had happened to Baby. She also wanted her cats.

"Aunt Batty," she said to herself. "Aunt Batty." She strode off as best as she could, in a way that she had seen her father's friend, Uncle Sirius, do. Her steps were a little wobbly, but obviously purposeful.

Bathilda Bagshot peered out the window when the doorbell rang. A tiny figure stood on her doorstep, jumping up and down to reach the bell. Red curls bounced every time she landed, and green eyes were fixed on the button. Bathilda opened the door.

"Hello, Holly," said the old woman. "Did you come for candy?"

Holly shook her head. "Can't find Mummy or Daddy or Baby."

Bathilda's eyebrows creased. Her heart sunk. "D-Did they go out?" she asked, knowing full well the answer.

Little Holly shook her head again. She told Bathilda what she had seen.

"Okay, sweetie, I have to call a friend. Help yourself to the pumpkin pie," said Bathilda. She got Holly settled with a small piece of pie and then rushed out of the room as fast as her arthritis would allow her. She whipped out her wand.

"*Expecto patronum!*" cried the old woman. A silver bird with wide eyes erupted from the end of her wand. "It's happened, Albus," she told it. The owl nodded and flew out the window.

"Aunt Batty!" called Holly.

Bathilda hobbled back into the room and gazed upon the tear streaked three-year-old. "Yes, sweetie?"

"I left Kitty. I want Kitty please."

"Do you mean the kitty you and the baby share, or the kitty you sleep with?"

"Soft Kitty. Kitty I sleep with. Let's get Kitty, please?"

“We have to wait, okay? My friend is coming over, and he’ll take you to get your kitty.”

Holly pouted. “When I get Kitty, can Kitty have pie?”

“Of course, sweetie.”

In the meantime, Bathilda gave Holly a pair of socks, with which Holly played quietly for a few minutes.

There was a knock on Bathilda’s door. Bathilda hobbled to the door and peered out the window.

She opened the door. A man twice the size of any other ducked his head through the doorframe.

“Ello Bathilda. ‘Ello ‘Olly. I’m goin’ back to the house; if you want some o’ yer stuff, ‘Olly, ye should come wi’ me,” said Hagrid.

Holly dropped the socks and scurried over to Hagrid, who picked her up as easily as Holly had lifted the fork to eat her pie. “Hagwid, let’s get Kitty, please.”

Hagrid chuckled. “G’night, Bathilda.”

“Good night, Hagrid,” said Bathilda, closing the door.

Hagrid took Holly down the street back to her house. Several children scrambled out of the way to let them pass. Bags of candy spilled over and a few shrieks reached Holly’s ears.

Hagrid placed Holly in the doorway and then ducked inside. Holly’s wardrobe was tipped over on the floor. Hagrid stood it upright and peered up at the hole in the ceiling. In a flash of red hair, Holly had raced up the stairs and into her room. She surveyed it. Her wardrobe was the only thing missing. She stepped over to her bed. She reached up and pulled down the guardrail, using it as a step to get onto the bed. Holly climbed up and lifted a stuffed orange striped cat into her arms. She jumped off the bed and shuffled into the hall, and then Baby’s room.

Hagrid was holding Baby, tears trickling into his wild beard. Baby was cooing softly.

“Hawwy!” cried Holly, suddenly remembering his name. She waved at Harry, who took no notice and instead giggled happily.

“Hagrid,” said a voice from the doorway. Holly turned around to see her Uncle Sirius. “Give them to me, Hagrid. I’m their godfather.”

“Sorry, Sirius. I got strict orders from Dumbledore,” replied Hagrid.

“Lily and James would’ve wanted them to go to me.”

“Lily and James trusted Dumbledore,” said Hagrid. “He’s goin’ to Lily’s relatives.”

Sirius was temporarily stunned. Then he said, “Take my bike, then. Good luck, Hagrid.” He vanished with a loud *crack!*

Holly looked back at Hagrid.

“I’m tired,” she said.

“Go get some clothes, ‘Olly. We’re leaving.”

“Where are Mummy and Daddy?”

There was a moment of silence. Hagrid choked for a moment, then said, “They’re on vacation. They send their love.”

Holly nodded and ran downstairs. She opened her wardrobe and pulled out her favorite pair of pajamas, the red ones with the feet. She changed quickly, and then pulled out some more clothes. A little bag soared over to her from the corner, and the clothes jumped into it. Holly swung it over her small shoulders and clutched Kitty to her.

“Hagwid!” called Holly, and Hagrid clomped down the stairs. “I’m ready,” said Holly.

Hagrid picked up Holly. The last thing Holly thought that night, was that she was back at Aunt Bathilda’s house, being tucked into a bed

without a goodnight kiss from her mother, and that she was saying good bye to her little brother, Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived.

Chapter 2

Holly's Letter

Professor Albus Dumbledore rang the doorbell to the Goldwell Orphanage. He waited. The door opened and a boy almost five feet high opened the door. "Hello. I'm Emmit Umber. How may I help you?" said the boy.

"I am Professor Dumbledore," said Professor Dumbledore. "I am here to see a Mrs. D'Oro."

"You're here for Holly, aren't you?" asked Emmit Umber. "Her aunt sent her a letter this morning saying you were coming. Holly wouldn't say why, though."

"Indeed I am here for Miss Hollinda. But please allow me to speak to Mrs. D'Oro," replied Dumbledore.

"Oh, sorry," said Emmit. "Come in."

Dumbledore stepped over the doormat and into the sitting room. Emmit gestured to a large armchair, which Dumbledore sat in. "Should I tell Holly you're here as well?" he asked.

"No, thank you, just Mrs. D'Oro," declined Dumbledore. Emmit Umber nodded and hurried upstairs. Moments later, a rather large, red-faced woman appeared and rushed to Dumbledore.

"I am so sorry for the wait, Professor Dumbledore. Emmit is a good boy, but rather chatty," said Mrs. D'Oro.

"Not at all, Madame, he was very courteous," Dumbledore reassured her.

"Well, I imagine you're here about Holly," said Mrs. D'Oro. "Dear girl, it's a shame her aunt couldn't keep her any longer."

"You dislike having Hollinda here?" asked Dumbledore.

“No, of course not. It’s just, she has her quirks. Always daydreaming, and when we ask her what she’s thinking, she tells some fantastic story about magic that her aunt told her. The little ones love her, though, bless them. And sometimes, strange things happen around her, nearly impossible things. Luke Malloma snuck in and cut off her braid the night she got here. He was punished, but the next morning Holly’s braid was back, as though nothing had even happened! And then there was an argument between a few of the nursery schoolers. Over the last juice box, you see. Well, Holly had been watching the whole thing, and then ten minutes later, there was a new package of juice boxes waiting on the front step,” Mrs. D’Oro said, her eyes wide.

“And you link Miss Potter to these events?” asked Dumbledore. He was quite calm.

“They started happening two years ago, when she arrived,” said Mrs. D’Oro.

“Well, I am Professor Albus Dumbledore, and I have come to offer Holly a place at my school,” said Dumbledore.

“That’s brilliant,” said Mrs. D’Oro. “Holly’s been talking about schools for ages. We teach here, but it’s not quite the same, she says.”

“Ah, I see. May I please speak to Holly?” he asked.

“Of course,” she answered. “She’s upstairs in her room.”

Mrs. D’Oro led Dumbledore up three flights of steps. The first door on the left was closed. Mrs. D’Oro knocked. “Come in!” called Holly. Mrs. D’Oro opened the door.

“Holly, this is Professor Dumbledore. He’s here to speak to you.” Mrs. D’Oro left.

Holly was sitting on a small chair in the corner, clutching a book. She put it down on the tiny table next to it. “Hello, sir,” she said, jumping out of her chair and offering it to Dumbledore, who sat. She seized her book and put it back on the large bookshelf next to her desk. “Aunt Bathilda told me about you. She said you’d come because of Mrs. D’Oro.”

“Bathilda was right, as usual,” said Dumbledore. “I am truly sorry that you couldn’t go live with your brother, but your aunt and uncle are being difficult. They seem to think you will show signs of magic to Harry, and that he will do the same. There was also something about losing control of him, and more about your cousin.”

“What’s his name again, sir? My cousin, I mean.”

“Dudley Dursley.”

“Oh, yes. And my brother is Harry, and from what Aunt Batt-Bathilda, sorry, says, Dudley is very large and Harry’s wearing his old clothes,” Holly said. Dumbledore did not answer, so she went on, “Every time Aunt Bathilda had a friend over, they’d look at me and say, ‘Ah, yes, little Harry Potter’s sister.’”

“At Hogwarts, we value people for their skills, not who they’re related to,” said Dumbledore.

Holly smiled. “Thank you, Professor. I just have one question. Do you think I could take Aunt Bathilda to Diagon Alley? I’m sure we’d get a discount on my school books.”

“I believe you could take Bathilda, so long as she is willing and is physically capable,” said Dumbledore.

“Aunt Bathilda used to tell me that so long as she can stand up, count to ten, and remember our names, she’s not old,” Holly told him. Professor Dumbledore also smiled.

“That sounds like Bathilda,” he said. He stood up and told Holly, “I am going to tell Mrs. D’Oro that you will be going to visit your aunt on Tuesday. The train at 11 ‘o’ clock on Friday, August 1st. Please send your aunt a *letter*, and wait for a *response* before you run off to Diagon Alley.”

Holly grinned and said, “Yes, sir.” Dumbledore bowed and left the room.

Holly opened the drawer in the little table and took out parchment, ink, and a quill. She sat in the chair and began to write.

Dear Aunt Batty,

Professor Dumbledore explained everything to Mrs. D'Oro. He also says that yes, you can come with me to Diagon Alley, so please stop bombarding me with carrier pigeons asking so. The last batch left an awful mess on the floor. I agree that they are less conspicuous than owls, but I've had to lay down mats in my wardrobe and hide them there. Mrs. D'Oro nearly caught me when one started laying an egg in a nest she made out of lint! Please use owls now, because the cries of hungry chicks wake up the boy next door, who asks if I'm keeping doves in my dresser.

I will visit on Tuesday and we can leave for Diagon Alley then. I will also bring you any unhatched eggs then.

Love,

Holly

Chapter 3: An Outing With Aunt Batty

In her walker, Bathilda Bagshot tottered along beside an eleven year-old with dark red curls. The girl was walking slowly to allow her to catch up. She was holding a length of parchment and staring at it. "Aunt Batty, we have to get my spellbooks next."

"Of course, sweetie," wheezed Bathilda. "Flourish and Blotts should be coming up next."

"Auntie, are you sure you're feeling alright?" asked Holly concernedly. "We can get you in your wheelchair if your legs get too tired."

"I'm standing aren't I? I'm fine," replied Bathilda.

"If you say so," said Holly. She turned the corner into Flourish and Blotts. "Excuse me," she asked, "I'm starting my first year at Hogwarts and I need my books."

"Are you accompanied by an adult, Miss?" asked the wizard behind the counter.

"Yes, she is," wheezed Bathilda from the door. "And can we get a discount on her books?"

"Why, y-yes, Miss Bagshot, of c-course!" stuttered the wizard. "Is this your granddaughter?"

"My niece," replied Bathilda. "By adoption, actually."

"Of course," answered the wizard. "So what's your name, dear?"

"Holly Potter. May I please have my books?"

The wizard blinked, but nodded and hurried through the curtain to the back room.

Holly turned around and helped Aunt Bathilda through the door. "I have to get my quills and stuff," she said. "Can you stay here and wait for my books?"

Bathilda nodded, so Holly moved deeper into the back of the store. She was examining a package of raven feather quills and some color changing ink, when she heard voices.

"I'm sorry, dears, but we have to get your books second-hand; they're too expensive with both of you, and Bill, Charlie, and Percy's books." This voice sounded like a stressed out mother.

"Perfect Percy," said another voice.

"Percy's books were all new," said a nearly identical voice.

"Percy needs glasses, he won't be able to read the text if they're Charlie's old books," said the mother.

Holly blinked. Did this mean that the family was so poor they couldn't afford glasses for a son who needed them?

Holly edged her way around a table with a card reading, 'The Invisible Book of Invisibility' that seemed to be empty. She dug in her money pouch and withdrew a handful of gold Galleons. She walked around until she saw a short, plump woman and two boys who looked to be twins. All of them had red hair like Holly's. The twins scowled at their mother and rushed off somewhere.

"Mum, look at this!" called another red-haired boy. The mother left the cart and went to see her son about a book on dragons. Holly slipped the money in their cart and hurried off. If they knew she'd been eavesdropping, they would be humiliated.

"Okay, Aunt Batty, I've got my stuff," she said, placing her quills and ink on the counter. She paid and they stepped out to finish their shopping.

Chapter 4: Meet the Weasleys

Holly had her new trunk and her new owl, Athena, in her trolley. Kitty was in the trunk with her clothes. The day before, Luke Malloma had stolen the toy cat and Holly had gotten in a fight with him. The previous night she had had a black eye and a chipped tooth. This morning she had woken up perfectly fine, eye and tooth healed. Kitty had had a few stitches ripped out, but she also had been magically repaired.

Now she stood on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. The only thing left to do was figure out how to get her trunk on the train.

Somebody burst through the barrier and knocked her over. Athena went flying. The Barn owl screamed her displeasure and was caught by the boy who had knocked her down. Her trunk rolled over, opened, and Kitty fell out. Holly scrambled to hide the cat. Dusting her off, she shoved the toy back in and closed the lid as Athena screeched at the intruder.

“Sorry! Oh, geez, are you alright?” He bent down and offered her a hand. Holly took it and stood up. She removed Athena in her cage from the boy. She put her back on the trolley and tried to lift her trunk. It didn’t budge. “Need some help?” asked the boy. Holly nodded and he picked up the trunk and put it back on the trolley. “I’m Charlie. Charlie Weasley.” He had screaming red hair like the boys Holly had seen at Flourish and Blotts.

“Thanks. I’m Holly Potter,” said Holly.

“As in Harry Potter?” asked Charlie.

“Yeah, I’m his sister,” said Holly.

“Wow. Come on, move out of the way of the barrier,” said Charlie. He pushed her trolley off to one side. “I’m a school Prefect, so if you need anything at Hogwarts, just ask me. I’ll see you around. I’ll get my brothers to help you on the train.”

Two more boys burst out of the barrier. "Fred! George!" said Charlie. These *were* the twins from Flourish and Blotts. "This is Holly Potter. She needs help getting her trunk on the train. Will you?"

The twins exchanged glances. "Sure. C'mon, newbie." They pushed their trolleys toward the Hogwarts Express. Holly grabbed her trolley and followed, dodging the twins' mother, sister and brothers as they came through the barrier.

"Aren't you first years too?" asked Holly.

"Yeah, but we've been on the platform before," said Fred.

"Am I really that obvious?" asked Holly.

"You didn't move out of the way of the barrier. What did you do, grow up with Muggles?" asked George.

"For two years," replied Holly.

"Only two?" asked Fred.

"My legal guardian got too old for me to stay with her. They shipped me off to a Muggle orphanage," said Holly, panting and trying to keep up.

"You've got no parents?" asked George.

"My name's Potter, didn't you hear?" asked Holly, who was unused to nobody realizing she was an orphan.

"As in Harry Potter?" asked Fred. He stopped, grabbed his and George's trunks, and stepped onto the train.

"Yeah," said Holly. "I'm his older sister, actually." George lifted Holly's trunk and Holly seized Athena as a station employee swept her trolley away.

"Sorry about that," George apologized.

“Don’t be. I don’t want people to feel sorry for me,” said Holly. She stepped onto the train and followed George. He took her into a compartment.

“Don’t mind sharing a compartment with us, do you?” asked Fred, who was shoving his and George’s trunks onto the racks. George put Holly’s under the seats.

“No, I don’t,” said Holly. She put Athena’s cage by the window, where she peered out and watched students milling around outside.

“We’ve got to go say good bye to our family,” said George. “Want to come?”

“No, thank you,” replied Holly. “I’ll wait here.”

The twins shrugged and left the compartment. Holly got down on her knees and pulled out her robes and Kitty from her trunk. She threw them on over her clothes and ran her long fingers over Kitty’s ears. The toy cat was very old and slightly worse for wear. The originally silky cloth was now worn down to the point of being so rough that it was soft. “So, what do you think Hogwarts will be like, Kitty?” she asked it. “I am so sick of waiting behind Harry. I’ve never even met him. Okay, I knew him for a year, but I can’t even remember that! He couldn’t even talk!” Hearing footsteps, she quickly hid Kitty in her trunk, closed the lid, and willed it to move back under the seat. She kicked it back under just as the doors opened.

She leaned back on the seat. Fred and George came back in. “We’re moving now,” said George. The train floor shifted under Holly and she had the sudden feeling of falling. A green tinge to the light...

“Whoa, are you alright?” asked George.

“Yeah,” said Holly. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

Holly knew exactly why she had felt like she had. Aunt Batty had told her before she was taken away.

"You fell out of the ceiling. Do you the know reason that you're alive? Because you're a witch, Holly Potter. You would have been killed if you were a Muggle, and you were only three. You were only three, Holly, and you were smart enough to get out of the house, and come to me. You're different than most children. It's a good difference. You were almost as smart as Rowena Ravenclaw herself, and as brave as Godric Gryffindor. When you go to Hogwarts, you'll be in Gryffindor, mark my word."

"Aunt Batty, I was three. And after I got out, I started crying. How brave is that?"

"Bravery is not the lack of fear. Bravery is getting back up when life pushes you down. You've stood up so many times, sweetie."

"I'm nine."

"So?"

She had felt the floor cave under her in the closet. She was on a chair in the Hogwarts Express, across from the Weasley twins. She was in her kitchen, covered with dust from what had been the ceiling. She was going to Hogwarts, wearing her brand new robes as two boys stared concernedly at her.

"Anything off the trolley, dears?" asked a woman. She pushed a trolley full of sweets.

Holly jumped up and opened her trunk. She took out her money pouch. "Could we get a little of everything?"

Five minutes later, Holly, Fred, and George were munching on Chocolate Frogs and Fizzing Whizbees. Holly popped a Whizbee in her mouth and was lifted into the air. "So what was that orange thing in your trunk?" asked Fred. "When you opened it to get your money pouch."

“Oh,” said Holly. “J-just a pair of socks. I like socks. Socks can be as ridiculous as you want.”

“Fwee uben uh doak chop-“ started George.

“Sorry, but *what?*” asked Holly.

George swallowed. “If we open a joke shop, we could make cursed socks. The weirder the pattern, the stronger the curse. You know, for enemies.”

“That’s weak,” said Fred, frowning.

“That’s dark!” said Holly, alarmed.

“No, no, I mean like they put them on and they turn into canaries,” said George quickly.

“I think we should do that with custard creams. Canary Creams, we’ll call them,” said Fred. “Don’t be a goody-two-shoes, Holly.”

Holly was quiet. There was a long moment of silence, interrupted only when she came back down from the air as her Fizzing Whizbee wore off.

“Holly?” asked George. “He didn’t mean it, honestly.”

Holly met George’s eyes squarely. “Alright then,” she said, opening a Chocolate Frog and pulling out the card. Without taking her eyes off the card, she seized the frog, brought it to her mouth, and bit off its head.

“Holly, I’m sorry, I was joking,” said Fred. His eyes widened as Holly scowled and shoved the rest of the frog in her mouth.

“Snot that,” said Holly through a mouthful of chocolate. She tossed the card at George, who caught it. The card read:

Harry James Potter

07-31-1989

The only person to survive the Killing Curse. Famed for the defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

Beneath this was a moving picture of a boy with untidy black hair, bright green almond-shaped eyes, and round glasses clumsily repaired with tape.

George looked at Holly, who was staring moodily out the window. She watched them out of the corner of her eyes and at last said, "He looks like my dad."

The twins were saved from having to answer this by the doors sliding open. Charlie was there. He was wearing his robes, but he had a small red pin on his front that read 'Prefect', and he said, "We'll be there in about five minutes. Get changed." George handed the Chocolate Frog card to Holly and Charlie closed the doors and left. The girl shoved the card into her pocket.

Holly stepped out into the corridor so the twins could change. She reached back into her pocket and stared at the small boy. Some of the photos in Aunt Batty's house had talked. Could this one?

"Hello, Harry," she told the picture. The picture Harry looked up at her and mouthed something.

Hello, Holly.

Holly's heart leapt. Could she finally communicate with her little brother?

"Does real Harry know we're talking?" she asked it.

No. Sorry.

Holly sighed and shoved the card back into her pocket. She ran her fingers through her hair, trying to tame the wild curls, but to no avail. According to Aunt Batty, neither of her parents had curly hair. Why then, did she and not Harry?

The ground jerked under her as the train came to a stop. Holly fell, banging her head against the compartment door. The door slid open and Holly was caught on the ground by a Weasley *again*.

"You alright?" asked George, pulling her up.

"Yeah," said Holly, rubbing her head. "I'm really sick of falling down today."

The twins laughed. Holly made to move back into the compartment, but Fred blocked her. "Charlie says they'll get your stuff."

"Who's they?" asked Holly, still trying to get past him. Fred shrugged and Holly ducked under his arm. "Just one thing, it'll only take a second."

The twins glanced at each other and shrugged again. "We'll wait," they said in unison. She opened her trunk quickly and removed Kitty, hastily stowing it in the deep pocket of her robe with her Harry card. She closed it again, turned around, and realized George was still there.

Holly flushed dark red. She waited for him to make a humiliating joke about it, but all he said was, "Socks, eh?" She grinned and followed him off the train.

All she could see was students and a large figure ahead of them calling, "Firs' years! Firs' years over 'ere!"

"Hagrid!" cried Holly, and Hagrid turned around.

"Wha's this? Little 'Olly Potter? Last time I saw ye, ye was just a titchy thing, 'angin' onto that stuffed-"

"IT'S GREAT TO SEE YOU TOO, HAGRID!" yelled Holly, drowning out the rest of his sentence. The last thing she needed was for the rest of the world to find out about Kitty.

Fred reappeared, clutching the sleeve of a dark-skinned boy with dreadlocks. "George, Holly, this is Lee Jordan. Lee, this is George, my brother, and Holly Potter."

Holly shook Lee's hand.

"Is that the last of yeh? Get on the boats, the feast'll be startin' soon," said Hagrid. Holly shoved her hand into the pocket holding Kitty and stepped into the boat. Lee Jordan and the twins followed her and Hagrid got in the back. The boat tipped dangerously and Holly prayed that the cat wouldn't fall out.

Holly Potter's first glimpse of Hogwarts was magnificent. She was at the front of the boat and the castle lights lit up the water on the lake like tiny luminescent fish. She had always pictured it as a stern, austere building, because Aunt Batty's book had never had a picture of it. This was like a medieval palace where the royal family lived. She could only stare in awe at it as it loomed nearer, except to kick Fred once when he said something about wide-eyed newbies, even though he had never seen the castle either.

The hit land, and Holly stepped off first, resisting the urge to push Fred into the lake. It was not that she didn't like the boy; it was that they clashed too well. She, Fred, George, and Lee Jordan joined the throng of first years waiting outside the doors. The doors opened, and a severe, austere woman stepped into view. Holly's immediate impression was that she was not someone to cross.

"My name is Professor McGonagall," said the woman. "Welcome to Hogwarts. In a moment, you will be sorted into your houses. The four houses are, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house requires a certain quality. While you are here, your house will be like your family. You will share a common room and sleep in that house's dormitories. Points will be issued to your house if you succeed in performing a certain task, while rule breaking and misbehaving will deduct points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points will win the House Cup."

"Follow me to the Great Hall, where you will be sorted."

Holly whispered to George, "How will they sort us?"

"Don't know," whispered George. "Bill said it really hurts, but I think he was joking."

“Who’s Bill?” asked Holly.

“Our oldest brother,” answered Fred.

The throng started to move forward and Holly, the twins, and Lee were ushered ahead. They passed through enormous double doors and walked into the Great Hall. There were four long tables filled with students. The tables were bare, and Holly felt eyes on her and the others. She looked toward the front of the room. This table seemed to be the staff table. There was Dumbledore, and Hagrid, and a slightly mousy looking professor who seemed as though he was going to vanish into thin air.

Professor McGonagall came back into view. She was carrying a three-legged stool and a very old hat. The hat was patched and ragged. She put the hat on the stool and stood beside it.

The entire hall was quiet. Everybody seemed to be waiting for something. Holly felt for Kitty in her pocket, and was relieved to touch the soft orange fabric. What did they want them to do?

And suddenly a rip opened near the brim of the hat, and the hat started to sing.

“Oh, you may not think I’m pretty, but don’t judge on what you see,

I’ll eat myself if you can find a smarter hat than me,

There’s nothing hidden in your head the Sorting Hat can’t see,

So try me on and I will tell you where you ought to be!

Well back when I was newly made, and still being worn each day,

The founders four of Hogwarts lore argued which was the way,

To teach their students who arrived at this school, the very same,

When Godric Gryffindor was tired of this endless talking game.

He said, “We’ll split them up and teach them all we know,”

*And so as this, the four founders helped their school grow.
In Hufflepuff, those dedicated to work at tiring tasks,
In Slytherin, those cunning folk don't hide behind their masks,
In Ravenclaw, the higher mind is what they teach and tend,
In Gryffindor, the brave at heart can always find a friend.
So now they're gone, but here we still remain,
To take control of magic raw and use it, make it tame.
And here I am, I'm waiting in,
Let the sorting now begin!"*

A burst of applause followed this announcement. Professor McGonagall waited for it to die down, and then took out a list. "When I call your name," she said, "Come up here, sit on the stool, and put the hat on. Adams, Marjorie."

Marjorie Adams rushed up there and plopped the hat on her head. It covered her entire face, and a moment later the hat shouted, "Ravenclaw!"

"Ammos, Jacob."

Jacob Ammos put the hat on.

"Slytherin!"

"Bruno, Boris!"

"Hufflepuff!"

And so it went on. Lee Jordan was sorted into Gryffindor, and finally came the call of,

"Potter, Hollinda!"

Every eye in the room was on Holly. She swallowed and stepped forward. Her hand was still in her pocket, holding Kitty. She sat on the stool and pulled the hat over her head.

It covered her face. "Hello, Holly Potter," said a little voice in her ear. "You are a rather difficult one, I see. Smart enough to leave a place riddled with dark magic, brave enough to give money to a poorer family, but kind enough not to tell them. It appears you knit. That is a very hard task. What's this in your pocket? Your brother. Yes, very difficult living in his shadow, isn't it? Very brave of you. In that case, better be... Gryffindor!"

The hat cried the last word to the entire hall. Holly nearly melted with relief and lifted the hat off her head. She joined the Gryffindor table next to Lee and waited.

The twins were put in Gryffindor as well. At last, "Zellar, Cornelia," was put in Hufflepuff.

Dumbledore stood up. "I would like to say a few words. Here they are: Fidget, twitch, hesitate, smirk. Dig in!"

Plates of food filled the tables. They ate until Holly thought she might burst and was in a dreamlike haze when they were all dismissed. Holly happily followed the crowd and Charlie upstairs seven floors. They stopped at a portrait of a fat lady wearing a pink silk dress.

"Mothballs," said Charlie. The portrait swung open. Holly said goodnight to the twins and followed some more girls her age up to the dormitories. She found her trunk and Athena waiting for her. She let the owl out of her cage and set it aside. Athena hooted softly and flew out the window.

Holly took out Kitty and opened her trunk. She pulled out her favorite pajamas, the red ones with the big pockets. Climbing into her four-poster bed, she laid Kitty on the pillow and closed her eyes.

Her last thought was, *Not so bad for the first day...*

Holly was asleep. She was also content to be asleep, so when she was awoken by a loud *bang!* from downstairs, it was quite unfortunate for the twins that she was angry. She stormed downstairs to find Fred and George rolling around on the floor, laughing their heads off.

“What do you think you are doing!” yelled Holly. “Are you insane?!”

“Well,” said George, “We thought we were setting off a firework. Consider it a wake-up call. Now go get dressed, breakfast is in half an hour.”

Holly looked down, realized she was still in her pajamas, and stormed back upstairs. She cast several dirty looks at the twins over her shoulder, but if they saw, they paid no mind. She went back into her dormitory and threw on her clothes and robes. She returned back downstairs. The twins were in an argument with a red-haired boy in horn-rimmed glasses.

“Could’ve given someone a heart-attack, what were you thinking?” raged the boy.

“We’ve been through this before, Percy, with Holly, we thought we were setting off a fire-work!” cried Fred.

Percy. Percy. The boy who needed glasses! Thought Holly. She was glad to see that her Galleons had been put to good use.

“Hello, Holly,” said George. “Took you long enough.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Holly. “I’m starving. Let’s go eat.”

“Wait a moment, Missy, you are not leaving, I am not through with them!” cried Percy.

“Well, could you hurry it up? I need them to come with me because they’re the only people who can eat as much as me, so they’re coming so I don’t look like a pig.” said Holly.

Percy seemed stunned. “Let them alone, Percy, you’re not a Prefect yet,” said Charlie, coming down the stairs from the boys’ dormitories.

The twins seized this moment as an opportunity for escape and rushed to the portrait hole, dragging Holly with them.

“Why the heck did you set off a firework anyway?” asked Holly. They clambered out of the portrait hole and the twins jumped on the staircase banisters and started sliding down.

“We thought it would be funny!” called Fred.

“And it was!” called George.

Holly was now running to keep up with them. Then the staircase moved. Holly froze. The twins slid off the end of the banister and fell out of sight. Holly peered around the edge and thought she saw two orange dots sinking into blackness. She sat and waited for the staircase to stop, sick images of the twins splattered on the ground filling her head. The staircase stopped. Holly ran off it and onto the floor. Which one was she on now?

She ran into a tapestry. Expecting to feel pain she was surprised when it just slid over her. There was a secret stairway behind it! She ran down and came to a dead end. Bile rose in her throat and she gagged and spat on the tile. Desperately, she pushed on the wall.

Nothing happened. She pushed the other one. This one swung aside. Holly came out in the Entrance Hall. She glanced wildly around and saw Fred and George on the ground.

They were fine, as far as Holly could see. They were both just sitting on the floor, talking. Holly stepped over to them, as calm as one could.

She hit George on the arm. “You could have been *killed!*” she bellowed, pummeling every inch of the boy she could reach.

“No *ouch!* we couldn’t *oh! ouch!* There’s a *yow!* trampoline under the stairs!” yelled George. “*Stop, Holly!*” He grabbed both her wrists.

Fred stared. “Uh, hello, I nearly died too,” he said, and Holly kicked him. She pulled her hands free and walked into the Great Hall.

The twins were left on the ground. Fred cast his twin a look that said,
You?

I do not, said George. He stood up and followed Holly into the Great Hall. Fred's stomach growled and he walked after them.

Hollinda Alyssum Potter was curled on a chair in the Hogwarts Express, going over everything the twins had told her about her brother in her head. Lee, Fred, and George were talking Quidditch. Holly was never the athletic type, but the twins had tried out for the team the previous year, and Lee had taken on the role of announcer.

"Mum adores him," Fred said, making a slight face. "Went on and on about how polite he was. Thought he could use a bit of fattening up."

"He was a bit peaky looking," said George. "Looked like he'd been on a starvation diet. You, know, like those Muggle magazines. The all look like they've been deflated."

"He's in a compartment with Ron, just at the end of the hall," said Fred.

Holly rummaged in her robes' pocket and withdrew a battered Chocolate Frog card. It was very dirty, as Holly had taken to carrying it around over the summer, but on one side you could still make out the bright green eyes.

"Holls, you carry that thing around so much, why don't you just marry it?" teased George.

"What about you and Alicia Spinnet?" asked Holly coolly. George flushed and Fred gave Holly a thumbs-up.

The thing about being around Fred and George, thought Holly, is that you learn several decent comebacks. I guess you kind of have to.

The compartment doors slid open. A girl with bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth asked, "Excuse me, have you seen a toad? A boy named Neville's lost one."

They all shook their heads. The girl closed the doors again and left.

"I bet she's going down to Harry's compartment," said Holly. She stood up. "I'll be right back."

“Holls?” asked George. Holly looked at him. Their eyes met and Holly willed herself not to blush. If they found out... How long would they laugh?

Holly broke eye contact and ducked out of the compartment. She saw the girl coming back up the corridor. Harry had to be down there. She went to the very last compartment and peered in the window. A boy with red hair sat across from a boy with black hair. The two were talking and eating candy. Holly saw that it was a little of everything. She smiled, remembering her first trip with Fred and-

“Holly?” asked George. Holly jumped.

“What?” she demanded.

“I thought you were against Peeping Toms,” he said, leaning against the wall.

“He’s my brother,” said Holly. “It is my lordly right to spy if I want to.”

“You’ve been acting really weird lately,” said George. “I mean, weirder than usual, like weirder than with that cat of yours.”

“Shush,” said Holly. She glanced back up the deserted corridor before continuing, “If I have a stuffed cat it is none of your business George Pollux Weasley.”

“Did I say it was?” asked George. He raised one eyebrow and Holly turned pink. “The point is,” he continued, “you’ve been acting like Percy with a Filibuster Firework shoved up his-“

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence, there are eleven year-olds behind us,” said Holly.

“-nose,” said George quickly. “Nose, sorry, Holly, nose.”

“Whatever. I’m fine, George. Nothing’s wrong,” she insisted. He cast her a slightly bemused expression, but said no more.

“Oi!” called Fred, sticking his head out from their compartment. “Lee’s got a biting kettle, come look!” Holly, more to get away from George

than to see a fanged kettle, rushed past him and into the compartment. George himself was stopped by Fred. *You do, don't you?* his face read.

"NO," said George. He slid into the compartment as well.

"Potter, Harry."

Holly held her breath. *Pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease*, she thought.

"GRYFFINDOR!" cried the hat.

Holly, Fred, and George were sitting at the far end of the table, away from the sorting hat. Holly had insisted upon this, knowing that Harry would sit near the top of the table. The distance did not stop the noise of cheering as Gryffindors up and down the table erupted in cheers of, "We got Potter! We got Potter!"

The girl slumped her shoulders and rested one hand on her cheek. Her brother joined the table and was patted on the back by Percy, almost as Charlie had when she was sorted. Yet when she had been sorted, there had been no cries of, "We got Potter." It didn't matter that Holly had lived. Holly wasn't on a Chocolate Frog card. Holly didn't have a stupid scar on her forehead. Holly looked like her mother. Harry looked like his dad.

No. Hollinda Alyssum, you will not start thinking like that. I forbid you to think like that. The part of Holly's head that so often spoke like Aunt Bathilda rang in her head. *This is your brother. This is your closest relative in the world. Do not think like that about him.*

Fine Aunt Batty, thought Holly.

She watched her brother as she ate, entirely fascinated. Harry was...

Eating. Yes, that's fascinating Holly, just amazing. Even the way he chews is a miracle, said that annoying part of her mind. *Shut up*, thought Holly. She turned her attention back to Fred and George, who were scarfing down their food faster than they could pronounce it. "You're going to make yourselves hurl," she said calmly and put some

carrots on their plates. “Eat some vegetables, I’m growing taller than you.”

Holly Potter felt like the only person in the school who hadn't talked to Harry. Sure, the twins were her best friends, and they tried to cheer her up, often pulling gruesome pranks on Percy and once Severus Snape. She could hardly make eye contact with them now, not only because of the secret, but because they were the entire essence of what brothers should be.

Today Percy was pink and blue haired and had lime green fur on his hands and feet. He was also red in the face from screaming, because, as Charlie had foreseen, he was now a Prefect, and was at liberty to do so. Even though watching Percy rage at a couple of second years for looking at him was highly amusing, Holly worried that she and Harry would clash like the twins and Percy. Since every time she had tried spying she had been caught and given detention, she now had hardly any time to do homework. She was reduced to scrawling essays at meals, and Professor Trelawney was not helping with her frequent predictions that Holly was avoiding a short dark stranger. During this last lesson, Holly had purposely smashed six pink teacups and turned them into a pile of fine purple dust, which had got her another detention.

The twins had found this highly funny, and only after they had been sent to the Hospital Wing with pickles in their ears had they decided to lay off. Fortunately, the twins were very good about this, and, "Go away or I'll shove pickles in your ears," became a favorite saying of theirs.

"I've got detention with Trelawney tonight," she told Fred and George, who were poring over a piece of parchment in amazement. "Hello? Guys?" Fred looked up and George hurriedly shoved the parchment away. "What was that?" asked Holly suspiciously.

"Nothing," said Fred. George muttered something.

"*Accio parchment!*" said Holly. The parchment whizzed into her hands.

"How did you do that?" asked George. "That's a fourth year spell, how did you do that?"

"Well, while some of us are hexing people, and some of us are in the library trying to catch up on *freaking homework!*" said Holly. She

peered down at the parchment. "What's this? How can you find entertainment in an old piece of parchment?"

Something moved. Words formed on the paper.

Mr. Padfoot would dearly appreciate it if Holly Potter wouldn't insult the Marauders Map.

"Fred, George, what is this?" asked Holly.

Mr. Prongs agrees with Mr. Padfoot and thinks that Holly Potter ought not to ask her friends the answers to everything after he went through to win over her mother. Mr. Prongs suggests Holly Potter go talk to her little brother, but not about the Marauders' Map.

Holly threw the map down, seriously freaked out. "How the heck did you manage that? And what has this to do with my mum?"

"WE didn't make it," said George.

"Misters Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs did," said Fred.

"I'd love to go to Hogwarts, Aunt Batty," said Holly, flopping in a nearby armchair. "I'll join a group of friends, be too nervous to talk to my own brother, be freaked out on a daily basis, and fa-" she caught George's eye and said, "-never mind. I'm going to be late and that'll be two more detentions. I'll rage at you later."

"We can wait," said Fred.

"Yeah, we'll have Percy rage at us in your place," said George. "Oi, Percy!"

Percy turned around and started yelling some of the most obscene things Holly had heard in her life. She chuckled and exited through the portrait hole.

"-ll for my best friend," muttered Holly, finishing her sentence and strutting off toward North Tower.

“My dear, the crystal ball told me that you would be late, it matters not what the stars have decided,” said Professor Trelawney. She was sitting in her awful armchair and was knitting. Holly had nothing against knitting, and she sometimes did it herself, but the way Professor Trelawney did it made Holly sick. Frou-frouey. A small table with some herbs, a pair of scissors, and a bowl was obviously for Holly. A tiny pouf was set behind it. “You shall be cutting leaves for tea leaf reading. I am running low on my supplies.”

“Because your freaking crystal ball didn’t tell you,” said Holly under her breath. She sat on the pouf, which sank a few inches, lifted the scissors, and started snipping.

Holly snipped.

And snipped.

And snipped.

Holly snipped until the bowl was full, and there were still more herbs. Professor Trelawney gave her a new bowl, with a comment of, “Try to cut smaller, dear.”

Holly snipped.

Holly pretended she was snipping the heads of several long necked Trelawneys that kept growing back.

And still she snipped.

And snipped.

And snipped.

Holly filled three more bowls of leaves and then Professor Trelawney finally released her.

Holly was walking back to Gryffindor Tower when she heard Filch shrieking. Four small first years streaked past her, running like anything. Holly, having grown with Fred and George, rushed after them, not wanting to be framed for whatever they had done.

They all clambered through the Fat Lady's portrait hole. The Lady herself was grouching about how late it was and giving all of them, even Holly, a good telling off.

"I had detention!" cried Holly.

"Then you ought to be scolded doubly, young lady!" replied a very ticked Fat Lady. Holly growled and followed the first years. Her stomach did a back flip when she realized one had very untidy black hair and piercing green eyes. The brown-haired girl and Ron Weasley were going up to bed, as was a rather stressed little boy who looked to be their age. Harry was alone except for Holly.

Do it, she thought. "Harry Potter," said Holly. Harry turned around.

"Yes? Look, I've had a really long night, can I please talk to you in the morning?" said Harry.

"Please, it'll only be a second," replied Holly. She felt in her pocket for the Chocolate Frog card. "I want to show you a picture of my little brother."

Harry sighed and walked over to the strange girl. She was holding a very dirty Chocolate Frog card. "Scurgify," whispered the girl, and it scrubbed the dirt off.

Harry was staring at a picture of himself. He looked up at the girl- his sister? He looked back at the card and then...

Harry Potter sat down on the floor, very, very hard. "You're joking," he said and willed it to be true.

"No," said Holly. "Here, look. My guardian gave me this before I went away. *Accio my photograph.*"

It was the only other photograph Holly had of her family. It whizzed into her hand. She sat next to the boy and showed it to him.

The Potters stared down at the photo. It was a moving picture of a messy-black-haired baby and a small girl with short, messy, coppery curls. They both had green almond-shaped eyes. A woman with red

hair and the same green eyes held the baby, and a man with messy black hair and round glasses held the girl. They were all smiling and the baby was cooing.

The remaining half of the broken family in the picture looked at each other. Green eyes met green eyes. And the last Potters sat like that for a very long time.

Chapter 9

Rainy Days

Holly peered out of the window of the Gryffindor Common Room. The twins were hunched over a bit of parchment in one corner. Lee Jordan was nowhere to be found.

Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet, and Katie Bell were all sitting at a table in front of the fire, no doubt gossiping. Angelina had never struck Holly as the type to do so, but when put with other girls, women are bound to do what they will.

Holly shook her head. *You're a girl*, she thought violently. *Perhaps a tomboy, but still... Maybe you ought to make some friends who are girls. And you know you've been hanging out with F and G too much when in your head you start thinking like a boy- and when you start thinking of them as F and G. You can't talk about boys with boys. You can't discuss clothing and various other weird things with boys.* Holly sighed. Maybe she wasn't trying hard enough to make new friends.

It was still raining outside. She watched the giant squid doing the backstroke in the lake.

"Holly?" asked Harry.

Holly turned around. Her little brother, Harry Potter was there. He looked mildly freaked out, which was not surprising; Holly had only told him she was his sister yesterday.

Harry took a deep breath and said, "When you said you were my sister, were you kidding? Because if you were, it wasn't a very good joke, with the picture of my mum and dad."

Holly gave him a sad little smile. "No, Harry, I wasn't kidding. Did you ask Hagrid?"

"No," said Harry. "What does Hagrid have to do with anything?"

"Didn't he tell you who took you to the Dursleys?" asked Holly.

"Yeah, he did. Didn't mention a sister though, I think I would have remembered it," said Harry.

"I'm your sister, Harry. We've got Mum's eyes," Holly said.

I've heard that one way too many times," muttered Harry. Holly grinned. "Hey, did you ever hear or read anything about a three-headed dog?"

"Yeah, of course," answered Holly. "Cerberus, Hades' dog that guarded the gates to the Underworld. I guess a big three-headed dog would be good for guarding stuff. Why?"

Harry blinked. "No reason. Just came across it somewhere." And with that, he scurried out of the portrait hole.

"First years," Holly muttered. She watched the giant squid for a little bit longer as it did the sidestroke, then the butterfly. "Squids," muttered Holly. She got up off the couch. She had Herbology today, and breakfast could not come soon enough. She wasn't exactly looking forward to being covered in dirt, but at least it was something to do. This had to be the dreariest Monday Holly had ever experienced. She stepped over to where the twins were. They were still examining the piece of paper that had spoken to Holly last night.

"Where the heck did you get that?" asked Holly.

"Nicked it from Filch's office, first year," said George. "Here, look."

It was a map of Hogwarts. There were little dots floating around it, each labeled with its name. In the Gryffindor Common Room, three dots were labeled, *Hollinda Potter*, *George Weasley*, and *Frederick Weasley*. Holly watched her own dot. "Why am I not surprised?" she asked. "I think that the only thing that could scare me now would be if a horde of flying monkeys attacks me at breakfast. Come on, if you don't eat better I'll be taller than you again."

The twins had finally caught up with Holly in height. It had always unnerved her when she had to look down to see her friends. "Is there a shortcut on that map to breakfast?" asked Holly.

“Yeah,” said Fred. He pointed out a stairwell behind a statue on their floor.

“Well let’s go!” she cried. She dragged the two boys downstairs. The ceiling was cloudy gray today and Holly was surprised it was not raining on them. They sat down at the table. The twins helped themselves to pancakes while Holly glanced up and down the table. “Has anyone seen Lee?” she asked.

Connie Zellar from Hufflepuff came over to Holly. “Lee got in a duel. Some Slytherin prat hexed him, and he’s up in the Hospital Wing. The git who did it looks awful though, he’s sprouted little purple tentacles all over his face. Nasty.”

“What?” cried Fred and George at the same time.

“Lee can’t be in the Hospital Wing, we’ve got our first match coming up!” said Oliver Wood.

“Nothing we can do, though,” said Connie. “Somebody else will have to do commentary.”

The Gryffindor’s reaction was stifled by the arrival of the post as a hundred soggy owls flew in through the windows, sprinkling everybody with water. Athena landed in front of Holly’s plate and knocked over a plate of sausages. She flapped her wings and sprayed Holly, Fred, George, and Connie with water, and the latter three said some very rude things which I can’t type because my mother reads what I type to make sure I’m not writing anything inappropriate. Holly took the wet newspaper from her Barn owl, who dipped her beak in Holly’s pumpkin juice before nibbling George’s ear and flying back to the Owlery. Holly opened the paper and said, “Wow!”

“What?” asked Fred, who peered over to see the slightly runny paper.

“Look at this,” said Holly, and the three of them bent their heads over the article.

“Break-in at Gringotts Wizarding Bank,” read George. “Nothing was taken, because the vault in question had been emptied earlier that same day. Why make all the fuss about it then?”

Holly thumped George on the head. “Because somebody got in, you twit! They could take something the next time!”

George looked slightly put out. “Oh.”

Up and down the tables, the word started to spread. Breakfast was nearing its close, and Holly scarfed down the rest of her food quickly.

“What greenhouse are we in today?” asked Fred.

“Four,” said Holly. They left the Great Hall and were almost out the front door when a voice called out to them.

“Fred! George! Holly!”

Lee Jordan was hurrying down the stairs.

“Who did it?” asked George.

“Marcus Flint,” replied Lee. “I got him back, though. Where’d you hear?”

“Connie Zellar,” said Holly. Lee scratched his head.

“Yeah, she was there when we were dueling. My eyebrows started growing faster than those jetter beans we worked with last week.” Lee winced.

Jetter beans were the Muggle equivalent of runner beans, they just grew faster than bamboo if you watered them with the right potion. They also tended to try to eat anything they wanted, and Eloise Midgen had been sent to the Hospital Wing with only one ear.

They joined the line outside greenhouse four. Professor Sprout opened the door and led them in. “Today we’ll be working with Typhon blossoms,” she said cheerily. “If the flowers turn purple, duck, because they breathe fire.”

“A plant that breathes fire,” muttered George. “What next, fish with legs?”

Holly giggled and Professor Sprout said, “Mr. Weasley, five points from Gryffindor.” Everybody next to him clamped their hands over George’s mouth to stifle his retort. “Typhon blossoms produce two types of nectar. There is a spicy variety that you get from the red flowers, which are more dangerous, so put on your dragon-hide gloves. The other nectar is sweet, and it is in the blue flowers. Each blossom is made of tiny flowers, so pinch off one small bud and squeeze it into the correct jar, blue for sweet, and red for spicy.”

Fifteen minutes into the process, Eloise Midgen forgot to duck and somebody had to tip a watering can over her head. While Eloise was taken to the Hospital Wing, her group was short one person. “Miss Potter, come over here and help them,” said Professor Sprout. Holly trotted over to Connie’s group and thought she saw for a second the twins slipping red flower buds into their pockets.

Holly chatted with Connie for a while, and only had to duck a few times when the Typhon blossoms decided that her red hair wasn’t on fire after all and attempted to correct the problem.

“That was one of the better classes,” said Connie after class. “I’ll see you in History of Magic, Holly.”

Holly caught up with Fred, George, and Lee and said, “Were you sneaking spice nectar?”

“Why should you care?” asked George coldly.

“You completely deserted us!” said Fred.

Lee shot her an apologetic look and lagged behind a little bit.

“Sprout told me to join them!” said Holly. “If you’re upset that I need other friends too-“

“You were acting bleeding girly!” said George.

“I am a girl!” said Holly, and the entire procession stopped.

"You don't act like it," said Fred.

"Your point?" asked Holly.

"You act totally different around them," said George. "How do we know you're not leading us on?"

"Leading you on!" cried Holly. "What the bloody hell do you mean?"

There was a moment of silence.

"Are you calling me a slut?" yelled Holly, and she thanked God that nobody else was around. "If it's news to you that I'm a girl, why in the freaking--"

"We're not calling you a slut," said Fred. "But if you'd rather hang out with those girls than us--"

"Why in the world would I be talking to you if I did?" interrupted Holly.

Another moment of silence. Holly fought back tears. George stared at his feet. Fred stared at George's feet. Lee watched the entire thing with a look of confusion. Only when Holly had torn off to their next class did he speak.

"You fancy her, don't you?" he asked.

Nobody responded. Finally Fred said, "We're going to be late for the next class."

Lee was about to ask when they had started caring, but suddenly he was all alone on the grounds.

Chapter 10

Classes went badly the day of the first fight. In Potions, Holly's Sanguine Elixir for replacing blood caused her cauldron to melt. It also burned a hole in the floor, and if one stood over said hole, you could see the potion plummeting through nearly solid earth. Holly doubted it would stop until it came out on the other side of the planet. Needless to say, a very livid Snape gave her detention.

In Divination, Professor Trelawney predicted that Holly might become a murderer and the imminent deaths of the twins. They all found crosses in their cups, which predicted pain and suffering. Due to the normalcy of this, nobody paid it much mind.

In History of Magic, nothing happened. Just being there was bad enough.

For the rest of the day, Holly refused to sit with the twins at mealtimes and ate with Angelina, Alicia, and Katie instead. The girls were surprised, but tactfully did not ask questions.

Harry Potter was a bit preoccupied with finding Nicholas Flamel and defeating a troll, so he didn't really notice the rift between his sister and her best friends.

Holly refused to speak to them. Poor Lee became something of a messenger. The twins spent their time creating a fireball candy that allowed one to breathe flames. They resolved not to give it to Holly while she was still angry.

One night, Holly was doing homework and the twins were working on the fireball. Lee was reading *Quidditch Through the Ages* and was sick of the tension in the room. The biting kettle was running around the room, making little yips. "Cut it out!" yelled Lee.

All three of them looked up. Usually laid-back Lee had thrown his book on the table. The biting kettle stopped, stared at Lee and calmly nibbled his ankle.

"If it's the kettle, go put it upstairs, mate." said George.

"It's not the bleeding kettle!" yelled Lee. "It's you! Holly can have as many friends as she wants and I didn't realize you were so uptight about it!"

Both twins turned the color of a beet with a bad sunburn. Holly raised an eyebrow and tried to kick the kettle as it gnawed on her leg. The kettle flew across the room, growled at Holly, and hopped up the stairs.

There was a yell and Harry Potter came downstairs clutching the kettle. "Is this yours?" he asked as the kettle tried to nip at his fingers.

"Put it down, please, Harry," said Holly. He did and jumped back as Holly muttered, "*Petrificus Totalus*." The kettle froze and tipped over. Nobody paid attention to this. Lee seethed silently. Harry went back upstairs.

"What is the problem here?" asked Lee.

"They don't understand why I have to have friends besides them," said Holly.

"She acts like a totally different person around the girls," said Fred. He looked at his twin, who was opening and closing his mouth like a fish. Lee raised an eyebrow and George turned away and took his feelings out on the kettle, which was unable to move as it began growing fur.

Ignoring the hairy kettle, Holly looked at Fred. "Of course I act different around the girls!" she said. "I support almost anything you do. I laugh when you hex Percy. I listen when you talk Quidditch and I don't understand anything you say. I go to most of your practices. But I'm pretty sure you would be very creeped out if I talked about girl stuff with you two."

All the blood in Fred's face went out and he looked sick. The backs of George's ears were purple. "Exactly," said Holly. "I'm not a boy. I really, really, hope you realize this."

Lee tried not to laugh. George turned around looking like a tomato. Fred resembled Nearly Headless Nick. Holly looked back at her

homework, a tiny smile on her lips. "So are we all squared away?" asked Lee. All three of them nodded, mortified. "Okay," continued Lee. "Let's never, ever, speak of this again. And George, may I advise you do something about that before your head explodes?" George nodded again, walked up to his dormitory, and there was a splash. He came back down sopping wet. He had dumped the entire water pitcher on his head. Everybody laughed, and everybody's face returned to normal color.

Inside Holly's head:

Do I daydream more than the average thirteen-year old girl? At least more, er, about boys? Oh who am I kidding? Am I totally strange for liking my best friend? Do they know? Why the heck did this- no, I refuse to start talking like someone in a soap opera! What the heck is wrong with me?

How long would they laugh if they knew? How humiliated would both of us be? Would we still be able to be friends? And am I a baby for keeping Kitty? None of them has ever said anything about it. I think I would die if we all couldn't be friends. I'm not Holly. We're Holly and Fred and George and Lee.

Inside Fred's head:

I'm insane. That's the only logical explanation. For a minute I wanted to say... they deserve it, I know. But we keep secrets. That's what twins do, because even if we have separate lives, we're like socks. We come in a pair. I wouldn't tell her, and he wouldn't tell her. Damn this. Damn being thirteen.

Inside George's head:

Why the hell couldn't I talk?! What the hell is wrong with me?! I was in a bubble! A freaking bubble! Couldn't talk, couldn't listen, what the heck do girls talk about anyway? All of a sudden I was a Puffskein!

Make a joke, George. Don't let them see what you're thinking. The pitcher was good, very distracting, open your mouth, say something. Say something. Speak!

Damn, I'm an idiot.

Inside Lee's head:

Awkward silence. Okay, um, this is embarrassing. Fred looks mad, Holly's off in her own little world, George is a fish again. I think I'll just edge away quietly. Okay, bye.

"I'm going down to the field," muttered George. Hitting some Bludgers was just what he needed. The tension was making him grow mad.

Fred nodded and said, "I'll come too."

They took the shortcut down to the Entrance Hall, got their brooms and the Bludgers from the shed, and headed to the pitch. They let the Bludgers go and took off.

Whack. George's bat connected with the Bludger. "I looked like a moron," he said to Fred.

Whack. Fred hit the Bludger. "Yes you did," he replied.

Whack. "Thanks. You did well, though."

Whack. "Why do you care so much?"

Whack. "No reason."

Whack. Fred nearly fell off his broom. "I think I know."

Whack. "Why then?"

Whack. "You do! I've known it since first year! Hah!"

Whack. "What- I do not!"

Whack. "Oh yes you do, I'm your twin, you can't lie to me."

Whack. "Fine, I do. What's your point?"

Whack. "Hah, I was bluffing!"

Whack.

Whack. "Watch it!"

Whack. "If you tell, I'll tell Angelina you fancy her."

Whack. "Come on, would I?"

Whack. "I choose not to answer this question."

Whack. "Hey!"

Whack. "I was kidding. What makes you think I'm upset about that?"

Whack. "Because you're *smiling*."

Whack. "Shut up. I smile and suddenly you assume..."

Whack. "But you do!"

Whack. "I thought I already admitted that."

Whack. "Are you gonna do anything about it?"

Whack. "Are you kidding?"

Whack. "What do you think?"

Whack. "What would I do about it?"

Whack. "Kiss her."

"*What?!*" *Whack.* George nearly fell off his broom. "You're insane! Do you know how much hot water I'd be in? We're thirteen!"

Whack. "So? Kiss her after our birthday. You won't be thirteen, and it'll be your present to yourself."

Whack. "And if she turns me down?"

Whack. "She won't."

Whack. "Excuse me?"

Whack. "She won't."

Whack. "How the heck do you know?"

Whack. "Have you seen how she looks at you?"

Whack. George blinked. "Yeah. With her eyes."

Whack. "Don't be a prat. It's her eyelids. Watch the eyelids."

Whack. "What about her eyelids?"

Whack. "You know! Her eyelids drop just a little bit more. Not like she's closing them, but like they're not open all the way. And not like a slut, just like she's doing that face."

Whack. "What face?"

Whack. "The face. The 'you're saying something that really annoys me and I'm finishing this conversation' face."

Whack. "Wait. Why were you looking at her eyelids?"

Whack.

Whack. "Fred!"

Whack. "I'm analyzing things girls do when they like someone."

Whack. "Why the hell would you do that?"

Whack. "Angelina."

Whack. "Typical."

Whack. "At least I can talk to Angelina."

Whack. "I can talk."

Whack. "Face it George. You have 'the Puffskein blues.'"

Whack. “The what?”

Whack. Fred grinned wickedly. “It’s when all you can do is squeak in front of a girl you fancy.”

Whack. “I didn’t squeak.”

Whack. “You didn’t talk either.”

Whack. “Shut up.”

Whack. “You have the Puffskein blues for-“

Whack. “That’s the stupidest term I’ve ever heard.”

Whack. “I didn’t make it up.”

“Oof. I’m going inside.” George caught the Bludger with a grunt and touched back down to the ground. Fred caught the other and followed him, grinning from ear to ear.

“And if you tell anybody this conversation-“ started George.

“I won’t. Not even Holly.”

“You better not.” And they strode back to the castle.

Chapter 11

"I'm going down to the field," said George. Fred went with him and they left the portrait hole. I was left nearly alone, with the exception of the hairy kettle. I settled back on the floor and kept working on that stupid essay for Quirrel. I don't like Quirrel. His turban smells funny. Fred and George say it's stuffed with garlic to keep away vampires.

Fred and George were out the window now. I could barely hear the whack of their bats on the Bludgers. Stupid essay.

I scrawled a few last words and went up to my dormitory. For some strange reason, no one else was there. I didn't mind and I didn't wonder why. It was all my good fortune. I rolled on my bed and picked up Kitty.

"Hell is being a teenager, Kitty," I told her.

Kitty's little beaded eyes just seemed to stare back at me. I know she can't talk, but sometimes I expect her to.

"You know what would happen if I told him?"

The cat did nothing.

"Exactly, Kitty."

And it went on like that for sometime. Yep, me, a thirteen year old girl, talking to a stuffed animal. I'll spare you anymore of this ugliness and cut to when the twins get back. Holly out.

Holly went back downstairs. The twins were sitting there with the weird candy. Fred opened it, popped it in his mouth, and blew smoke into the air.

"Needs more fire nectar," said George as Fred huffed and puffed.

Fred swallowed it and said, "It melted!"

"On a scale of one to ten?"

"Three. Back to the drawing board."

The twins sighed. Holly coughed. The twins looked up and George turned purple. Holly ignored this and said, "Let me see your notes."

George passed over a small green notebook. Holly flipped through it and opened it to the fireball candy's page.

"You need something more heat resistant. Either that or freeze the stuff before you sell it. How long do you want it to last?"

"Testing of Flaming Fudge #2. Testers: Holly Potter and Fred Weasley. Commence unwrapping!"

Fred and Holly stared at George. "Just open the bleeding candy," he said. They did as he said.

"Fred, you're first," said George. Fred put the candy in his mouth. His face turned red and steam came out his ears. When he tried to talk, flames came out his mouth.

George and Holly high-fived. Both of them turned slightly pink and they looked back at Fred. Fred swallowed the thing and more steam came out his nose. "Any pain?" asked Holly.

"None," said Fred. "Tasted like salsa."

Holly put her candy in her mouth and her entire face turned as red as her hair, giving her the impression that her whole head was on fire. She grinned and flames sneaked between her teeth. Tipping her head back, she blew fire into the air.

She swallowed it and said, "No pain, but it tasted like melting rubber."

"Formula #3 should do the trick," said Fred.

"Weasley's Wizard Wheezes is in business!" said George, and the all high-fived again and shook each other's hands.

December 25 dawned bright and everybody woke up with a pile of packages on their beds.

Holly got up and picked up the package on top. It had a letter from her Aunt Batty on it.

Dear Holly,

There's a box of owl treats in here for Athena as well. If she doesn't want them, you can give them to someone you hate. The book is written by Muggles, but it's about Greek magic.

Love,

Aunt Batty

Holly grinned and opened the package. It was a set of new quills, typical when your guardian is a historian. She pulled out the owl treats and resolved to take them to Athena later. There was also a book labeled, *Encountering Gods: The Tale of Nidia*.

From the twins there was a box of Fireball Fudge Formula #3. From Lee there was a large box of Fizzing Whizbees, Holly's favorite candy. For some reason, Mrs. Weasley had sent her an overlarge dark blue sweater. Because Mrs. Weasley had never seen Holly before, she had assumed she was about Fred and George's size. Fred and George were now much taller than Holly, and the sweater almost hit her knees. Harry had sent her a small leather-bound journal, while Holly had sent him chocolate frogs, a pun on their first meeting. And somehow, Emmet Umber had managed to send her a ball of purple yarn.

There was a tiny card edged in silver. Inside it read, "Happy Christmas; it's your season." There was a small doodle of a sprig of holly and the card was signed, "This is a Forgery."

Holly lined up all her cards on her nightstand, dressed, shrugged on the enormous sweater, and put Athena's owl treats in her pocket. She went down the stairs into the common room. Nobody was there. She went upstairs to the boys' dormitories.

Fred and George froze. "How'd you get up here?" asked George.

"Merry Christmas to you too, thanks for the Flaming fudge," said Holly dryly. "I walked."

"We can't get into the girl's dormitories; we tried on your birthday, remember?" asked Fred.

"I remember," said Holly.

"Mum didn't get your size quite right?" asked George, grinning.

"Oh, be quiet," said Holly, but she smiled too. "She hasn't ever seen me, George."

"Which I think ought to be corrected," said Fred. "Why won't you ever visit during the summer?"

"No," said Holly. "Not yet."

The twins' faces split into identical scowls. Holly raised an eyebrow and frowned at them. "Knock it off. It's Christmas."

The reason Holly wouldn't visit was because the prospect of being in the same house with him... what if they found out and she'd still be there? That would hurt. A lot.

"Well, you can't blame us," said George. "You won't visit and it's not like we can just pop up at the orphanage."

"You aren't sick of me by the end of the year?" she teased.

"We can't get sick of you until you come visit," replied Fred as he tore the paper off his own sweater.

"Alright," said Holly and then, "Morning, Lee."

Lee had sat up in his bed. "Christmas, schmistmas, it's still early," he yawned.

"Better or worse than the firework in first-year?" asked George.

"Better," said Lee, "there are presents."

And all three boys set to shredding the wrapping paper of their presents. Holly rolled her eyes and sat on the floor, occasionally ducking as a large colorful ribbon flew for her head. Fifteen solid minutes later, they were done, all of them wearing Weasley sweaters. "So," said Fred, tugging lightly on one of Holly's curls, "are you going to shrink that sweater or not?"

"Nah, it's lovely and warm," said Holly as she removed Fred's hand from her hair.

"See she didn't bother to put your initial on yours," said George. "I guess she thinks you know your name."

"But we're not stupid," said Fred. "We know we're called Gred and Forge."

George looked away and shoved a chocolate frog in his mouth. Holly raised an eyebrow but held her peace. She looked out the window and said, "Oi, it's snowing!"

Fred and George rounded that one off nicely by humming three bars of, 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas,' followed by the chorus of, 'God Bless Ye Merry Hippogriffs.' Holly smirked and left. As she was going down, she sang softly, "Have a very Harry Christmas, and when you walk down the street, say hello to the wizards you know and the house-elves at your feet."

There were very few of them at the Christmas feast that year. Harry, Ron, and Hermione were there, and Holly was pleased to see that he was learning to play Wizard's Chess. But even at this happy time of year, Holly was paranoid.

She peered into doorways for mistletoe. She gave a loud jump anytime a Christmas cracker went off, and finally Fred and George told her to calm down or they were dragging her off to the Hospital Wing to get the pickles out of her ears.

She did calm down a bit and won one of those weird hats with fruit in them from a cracker, while the twins found matching sombreros. Lee's cracker emitted what sounded somewhat like a very fat person singing opera, and six silver pennies fell out of it. There was much

trading amongst them until Holly had a sombrero, Lee the fruit hat, and Fred and George three silver pennies apiece. These were worth nothing in the Wizarding world, so somehow they managed to turn them into Galleons which would end up at Zonko's Joke Shop that spring. Mrs. Norris had run off with the other sombrero.

They went through the door to the Great Hall one at a time because *somebody* had put mistletoe at the top. Fred and Lee were through when Holly tripped. She was sprawled on the floor with her wand out when George fell over her.

"Want to see if we can get a clear aim at Fred's back from here?" asked George through gritted teeth.

"Whoever made up that tripping hex is either very clumsy or in considerable peril," grunted Holly. "Stand up, you're squishing me."

George did and Holly stood up also, brushing dirt off her new sweater. "He was right, I should've shrunk this," she said.

"It probably broke your fall," said George. There was a moment of awkward silence as Holly went over all the curses she wanted to use on Fred, and George wondered if one could glue an offender to the ceiling.

"Um," said Holly.

"Yeah," said George.

They both looked at each other and said at the same time, "I'm going to kill him."

They grinned and fidgeted. "The longer we stand here the more people are going to watch us," said Holly.

"That would be embarrassing," said George.

Another moment of silence. Finally George leaned over, kissed Holly, and ran to catch up with his brother.

Holly was left just outside the doorway, grinning for all she was worth as she sought out the passage back up to the Common Room.

Chapter Twelve

Cloak and Sock

George caught up to Fred and Lee. *"You said you wouldn't interfere you complete-"* he hissed to his twin.

"Did I?" asked Fred. "Did I indeed?"

"It was implied," said George.

Lee watched, bemused.

"If I recall correctly," said Fred, "I never said anything of the sort. The most I said was that I wouldn't tell anyone. Which I don't have to because you just told Lee here."

George looked from Fred to Lee and cursed. The latter two grinned and exchanged glances. They glanced back to the Entrance Hall where a slightly dazed looking Holly was taking the shortcut to the seventh floor. Fred smirked at George who attempted to grin back and failed.

"I'll be on the Quidditch pitch," sighed George. He trudged back to the Entrance Hall and out the double doors to the fresh air. He fished out his broomstick from the broom shed and was in the air within seconds.

Holly stared happily out the window, watching George do loop-de-loops on his broom outside. She settled back happily into the sofa and opened her book from Aunt Batty.

Encountering Gods: the Tale of Nidia by Maxindor Pepper. What a strange name. She turned the page and started reading.

The prologue was disturbing. *Who starts off a book by killing the main character?* thought Holly. She glanced around the Common Room. The others had filtered out, even Alicia Spinnet, who had also been watching George. There was a small slip of paper on the floor.

Holly closed her book and stood up. The paper almost floated into her hand. What was this?

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you.

Holly scowled and sat again. *Relax, Holly. There have to be plenty of people this could belong to, it doesn't necessarily mean...*

Raw anger and envy flooded through Holly's blood. There was Harry again, getting everything just because he was famous. Stupid Chocolate Frog card. Holly had as much right to that whatever it was as Harry did, if not more because she was the eldest. Wasn't Holly, after all, the head of this smashed family?

Holly swallowed. "I will not start thinking like that," she whispered. She glanced back out the window. George was nowhere to be seen. It was getting dark.

Would it complicate things more if they talked about it? Should she just talk to him in the morning? Oh, she was going to kill Fred. Still...

Holly stood up again and trotted up the stairs to the girls' dormitories. There was the card from the Forgery. He ought to work on that nickname.

The other girls were asleep.

She changed and got into bed. The stuffed cat was perched on the pillow next to her. Holly drifted off into dreams of a bar of gold, a traveling cloak, and a hat of fruit.

The next morning, Holly crashed back to reality.

"Oh, Merlin, oh, Merlin, oh, Merlin," she said.

Angelina sat up in bed. Alicia was already at breakfast, which was a plus in Holly's point of view.

"What's the matter?" asked Angelina.

"Can you keep a secret?" asked Holly.

"Yeah, I guess," said Angelina.

Holly glanced around the room suspiciously. "George kissed me," she whispered.

Angelina's face couldn't have been less surprised. "Why is this a secret? You are cute together," she said. "Everybody knows it."

Holly choked and rolled back on the bed, flinging the cat into the air, where it came back down with a thud. *"Everybody except me, apparently!"*

"Oh, get a grip. Talk to him, you prat. He'll think you were offended otherwise. Don't mention it, just acknowledge the fact that it happened." Angelina swung her legs out of bed and tried hard to suppress a grin when she saw the look on Holly's face. She dropped onto the floor and rummaged around in her trunk.

"That makes no sense!" said Holly. She rolled out of bed and dressed quickly.

"I can see you're disoriented," said Angelina.

"How?" asked Holly.

"That's your sock on your head," replied Angelina as she shrugged on her robes.

Holly glared at the other girl. She bent down and removed her hat from her foot and swapped it with the sock. Angelina turned away under the pretense of finding her bag, in reality shaking with silent laughter.

"I take it you won't mention this to Alicia?" asked Holly.

"Course not. This is like one of those Muggle shows. Scrub operas."

"Soap operas," corrected Holly. "Did I mention it was all Fred's fault?"

"What?"

"It."

"Tripping Hex?"

"Mistletoe."

"Don't beat him too badly," said Angelina. "We have Quidditch practice tonight. And I rather like his face the way it is."

Holly grinned. "If you say so."

Fred Weasley was alerted to the presence of his best friend by two fists closing round his neck. He was being shaken back and forth, making an attempt to get back to his eggs when Holly whispered, "Don't mess in my social life, you prat."

"And what is this?" asked a cold voice. "Release Mr. Weasley, Miss Potter. He is turning blue."

Holly removed her hands from Fred's throat. The unfortunate boy seized his pumpkin juice and gulped.

"Twenty points from Gryffindor, Miss Potter, for violence at the table. I would give you detention, but 'tis the season. If I catch you at it again, it will be detention. An outrageous example of Muggle dueling."

All this time, Professor Snape would not look Holly in the eyes. He settled for the bridge of her nose. He swept away like an enormous hooded cobra.

Holly sat in between George and Lee. Poor George was refusing to meet Holly's eyes as well. He looked at his toast. Lee cast Holly a sidelong glance and when Holly glared defiantly back, said, "So, how's the Flaming Fudge?"

Holly laughed for no apparent reason and set about putting food on her plate. She thought, *Not so bad after all.*

Chapter 13

Stars

It was New Year's Eve. Holly watched her best friends and her little brother flying. Their shadows were gray on the white snow.

Wood blew the whistle and everyone flew back to the ground. He started talking, but Holly couldn't tell what he was saying. Not that she cared. Wood tended to be a little long-winded. Instead, her mind drifted off several days ago, back to Christmas.

It started snowing. Holly loved the actual snow, but hated the cold. She bet that if she touched her hair it would snap off.

The Gryffindor Quidditch Team trooped into the locker room. Holly seized her chance. She had wanted to try this for days now.

Holly ran down the stairs. She rummaged in the Broom Shed and pulled out one. It was at least straight. She swung one leg over and kicked off.

It was like water. It felt like breathing clean air. Holly had never been athletic, but she had never really tried. She'd seen the neighbor boys peering over her back hedge in Godric's Hollow. Muggles who wanted a look at the little freak who lived next door.

Holly flew lower over the lake. She saw the giant squid doing the backstroke. Lower, and she skimmed the edge of her sneakers over the water. It was growing darker.

"Boo."

Holly nearly fell off her broom and in the lake. She tipped sideways and somebody's hand shot out and gripped her arm, pulling her away from the water.

"George Pollux Weasley, if you ever do that again-" spluttered Holly.

"You'd think you'd be used to it by now," said George. "I thought you didn't like sports."

"I don't," said Holly. She landed and dismounted the broom.

"You do a fair impression of a Chaser, then," said George. "Fred sent me to look for you."

"Oh, did he?" said Holly.

"Holls, you're turning blue."

"I am not!"

"You're out in the bloody snow with wet shoes. After dark. That's not a good combination."

"This from you, the one who hexed snowballs to follow Quirrel everywhere he goes."

"Give Fred some credit, here. We have to get back to the castle."

Holly hopped back on her broom and flew low over the snow to the broom shed. She hopped off and shoved it in the shed. George did the same.

"Filch is going to have a field day with this," said George.

"Don't remind me," said Holly.

"Why didn't you say you could fly?"

"I didn't know."

"Didn't you ever play Quidditch with your friends when you were little?"

"Of course not. Godric's Hollow was a part Muggle neighborhood. And what am I going to do, fly around the orphanage?"

"You had to try once."

"I did."

"And?"

...

"Holls?"

"A couple of Muggles saw me and they tried to hurt me. Aunt Batty had to chase them off."

"Oh. How old were you?"

"Six."

"Ouch."

"Yeah."

...

"Stay extra quiet and we can take a shortcut up to the tower."

"Right."

...

In the Common Room:

"Uh, 'bout Christmas," said Holly.

George's ears lit up like coals. Holly grinned, kissed him on the cheek, and hurried up to her dormitory.

A slightly dazed George staggered into an armchair. The room was empty, save for him.

Or so he thought.

"Two within a week," said Fred from the corner. "Congrats, Forge."

"Fred?" said George.

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to kill you."

“HE DID WHAT?” yelled Holly Potter, age thirteen.

“You haven’t heard?” asked Fred.

“It’s all over the school!” said George.

“Turns out that there was this stone thing under the school,” said Fred.
“The Sorcerer’s Stone.”

“Makes gold and stops you from dying,” said George. “And You-Know-Who was after it!”

“You-Know-Who took over Quirrel! It was in the back of his turban!” said Fred.

“Always smelled kind of weird,” said George. “But Quirrel’s dead!”

“And Harry beat him!” said Fred. “He’s knocked out in the Hospital Wing, though.”

“We tried to send him a toilet seat,” said George. “Madame Pomfrey blew a gasket.”

“And I, his bloody *sister*, didn’t hear anything?” yelled Holly.

“Not surprising,” said a voice from the top of the stairs. Millicent Bultstrode was standing, staring at the three with her hideous scowl. “You could use more brains.”

“It’s never good to talk to yourself,” said George, flaring up at once.

“First sign of insanity, they say,” said Fred.

“There are two types of special,” said Holly. “Special and *special*. I think you’re the latter.”

Millicent seemed temporarily stunned and then pulled out her wand. Her cronies, Linda Maleficus and Debra Viperspawn, closed in on the three red-heads from the other side.

“Can we take them?” whispered Fred.

“Reckon so, but it would be unsporting,” said George.

“I want to see Harry,” insisted Holly.

“What should we do?” asked Fred.

“I’m thinking first year,” said Holly.

“Think it’s still there?” asked George.

“Probably. If not, we’ll all wake up in the Hospital Wing. One hex each, and then we jump,” said Holly. She pulled out her wand and the twins did the same.

“Always wanted to have a duel,” whispered Fred.

“It’s probably overrated. We can save it for the trip home,” said George.

“Now!” yelled Holly. Six curses flew everywhere. Holly ducked. Millicent hit Viperspawn in the face. Viperspawn bellowed and knocked Fred off the stairs. Fred fell out of sight. “Jump!”

And they did, just like in the first year, when Fred and George had slid off the stairs. They fell down seven floors and bounced off the trampoline all the way back up. Three tall red-heads waved happily at the stunned and hexed Slytherins as they plummeted once more. They landed laughing.

“This is a good day,” said Fred.

“Brilliant,” said George. He slid off the trampoline and tugged Holly off. Fred rolled his eyes and clambered off.

“Rule One,” said Fred. “No mushy stuff.”

“Have we been mushy?” asked Holly.

“No, I’m just covering all the basics,” said Fred.

“That is very demeaning,” said George.

“Oh, stuff it,” said Fred. “Rule Two. If you break up, I’m not taking sides.”

“Fred Weasley-“ started Holly. She shook her head and said, “I’m going to see my brother.” She grinned and trotted off.

“Rule Three,” said Fred.

“Fred, we’re not even officially going out,” said George.

“And your point?” asked Fred.

George shook his head. “Where’s Lee?” he asked.

“Lunch,” said Fred. George went into the Great Hall, leaving Fred to stand and think up more rules between his brother and his best friend.

Holly hung on to her trunk and Athena. The owl was screeching her displeasure at being in a cage.

“Stow it, Attie,” said Holly to the owl. Athena closed her beak and gave a mellow hoot to Harry. “I’ll see you on the train, Harry,” Holly told him. It appeared as though Hagrid was imitating a windmill to get Harry to see him. Holly stepped on to the train and searched for the compartment.

There were the yips of the biting kettle and hisses of something larger. Holly opened the door and slid inside quickly. “Put them away,” said Holly to Lee. The biting kettle and the giant tarantula were wrestling on the floor. Lee waded into the fray and plucked out the tarantula, stuffed it in a box, and kicked the biting kettle. The kettle curled into a ball and hopped onto the seat next to Fred, where it started purring happily.

Holly giggled and shoved her trunk under her chair. She sat on the chair and let Athena out to flap around the compartment. The owl hung upside down and tucked her head under her wing like a bat.

“It’s not so much a kettle anymore, is it?” asked Holly, pointing to the lump of metal on Fred’s lap. “It’s more like a big brass cat.”

“That’s what we get for you being nice to it,” said George. The kettle sat up and growled at George, then went back to purring.

Fred looked at the creature. He patted the spout carefully. The kettle made a sound like a motorboat.

“I wonder what it could do,” said Lee thoughtfully. “You can have it if you like.”

“Dad would probably get fired,” said Fred gloomily.

“It looks harmless now,” said Holly. “Like a pet, really. Would it still make tea?”

“We’d have a pet kettle running around the house,” said Fred. “And speaking of the house, are you or are you not coming over this summer?”

“Of course I’m coming over,” said Holly.

Pure shock was etched on the faces of all three boys. She’d been asked to visit for three years and had turned them down every time.

“Mum has to get your sweater size for next year,” said George.

There was a knock on the compartment door. Harry slid in. “Holly,” he said. He was clutching a small leather-bound book. “Look at this.”

He sat next to his sister and opened the book. There were moving pictures of their family on every page. Lily and James dancing. Lily and James holding baby Holly. Lily and James with baby Harry zooming around on a toy broomstick while a curly-haired toddler chased after him, mouth opening and closing in happy shrieks.

On the last page was a family portrait. A red-haired woman held a dark-haired baby. She stood next to a man with round glasses who had his arms around a tiny toddler. The toddler clutched an orange stripey toy cat. The cat had one eye closed.

Holly dug in her trunk and withdrew Kitty. The normally wide-eyed cat was different.

She had one eye closed in a wink.

(A/N) Okay, that's it! We will be continuing the story. Please view my account page to look for the sequel. Read and review!

And thank you for reading.

-MaxindorPepper